Maintenance of Telephone Instruments in Rural Areas

*38. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether maintenance of telephone instruments in the rural areas as in Delhi is primarily the responsibility of Telecom Department;

(b) if so, what is Government's policy in this regard;

(c) whether Government have any mechanism to register complaints of subscribers in rural areas;

(d) if not, whether Government propose to introduce such a mechanism so as to mitigate the hardships of hapless rural subscribers who have to run from pillar to post to get their phones repaired; and

(e) if so, by when and if not, the reasons therefore?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN): (a) to (c) The responsibility of maintenance of telecom network including telephone instruments in the National Capital Territory of Delhi is with MTNL. In the rest of the country (excluding Mumbai which is with MTNL), the maintenance in rural areas is the responsibility of the Department of Telecom Services. There is a well defined mechanism to register complaints of subscribers in rural areas. In medium size exchanges, complaints can be booked on number '198'. However, in small size exchanges, a specific number is allotted for booking of complaints. Also instructions have recently been issued for booking of complaints round the clock. A Grievances Cell has been set up in the office of the Minister for Communications, where complaints can be sent either on telephone, or fax or by post.

Indictment of Air India by the London Court of International Arbitration

*39. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the London Court of International Arbitration has indicted Air India in the Aircraft leasing case filed by the Antiguan Leasing Company;

(b) whether it is a fact that Air India may have to pay Rs. 425 crores in damages for "Unlawful termination of contract";

(c) the persons responsible for this; and

(d) what action is being taken against the persons concerned?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHARAD YADAV): (a) and (b) Air India had taken two A310-300 aircraft on wetlease from Antiguan Company M/s. Caribjet initially for a period of six months with effect from December, 1994. The lease was further extended upto December, 1995. Again in November, 1995 Air India concluded a fresh agreement with M/s. Caribjet Inc. for wetlease of two L1011-500 aircraft and one A310-300 aircraft for a period of two years effective from 1.1.96.

Air India terminated the wetlease agreement with Caribjet with effect from September 4, 1996 on grounds of technical lapses and non-fulfilment of various norms of Directorate General of Civil Aviation. Caribjet, on their part, in pursuance of the provisions of the agreement took the matter to Arbitral Tribunal, London. The Arbitral Tribunal after hearing the evidence of both the parties, oral and written submissions, declared their award on 19.1.99 on the issue of liability. The Tribunal in the award opined that the wetlease agreement had been wrongfully terminated by Air India.

The Arbitral Tribunal heard the submission on quantum from both the parties in London in June, 1999 and has given its interim award on 15.11.1999. In terms of this award M/s. Caribjet has been awarded a net amount of US$ 23.63 million (Rs. 103 crores) towards early termination, excluding interests and costs against M/s. Caribjet's claim of approximately US$ 80 Million (Rs. 336 crores). Air India will make further submission to the Tribunal on outstanding matters.

(c) and (d) CBI has investigated the Caribjet deal but found no ground for registration of a regular case.